



NEWS RELEASE

Arizona House of Representatives

Representative David Stringer (R-1)

Representative Kirsten Engel (D-10)

1700 West Washington • Phoenix, Arizona • 85007-2844

Wednesday, December 20, 2017
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Reps. Stringer and Engel Form Bipartisan Study Group to Address High Incarceration, Recidivism



STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – Representatives David Stringer (R-1) and Kirsten Engel (D-10) today announced the formation of a bipartisan study group on criminal justice reform. The lawmakers organized the group to provide a forum for legislators to evaluate issues related to Arizona's high incarceration and recidivism rates in comparison with other states.

Arizona has the 7th highest rate of incarceration in the nation, according to the United States Department of Justice, and Arizona's 39 percent recidivism rate ranks only 28th best in the country, according to a December 2016 study by the Virginia Department of Corrections.

The study group will examine issues such as variations in incarceration rates across local jurisdictions for similar offenses, the impact of mandatory sentencing policies, and impediments to rehabilitation and reentry into the community. They will also evaluate the effectiveness and cost benefit of alternatives to incarceration such as pre-trial diversion, substance abuse programs, mental health treatment, work release programs, and closer supervision of offenders who are reentering the community.



The formation of the study group is an outgrowth of discussions between Stringer and Engel, both attorneys, about the human cost and budgetary impact of Arizona's high incarceration rate. Both agree that criminal justice reform is an area where Republicans and Democrats can find common ground. The focus of the study group will be limited to non-violent offenders.

“Arizona spends a lot of money locking people up,” Representative Stringer said. “Over-incarceration of non-violent offenders and recidivism are placing huge strains on both state and county budgets. My underlying purpose is to develop legislation that will support alternatives to incarceration that are fully consistent with public safety.”

Representative Engel added, **“We’re living every day with the negative consequences of Arizona’s excessively high incarceration rate for non-violent offenders. Incarceration makes it harder to get and hold a job, impoverishes families, and hurts the economic prospects of entire communities. We can do better.”**

Both Stringer and Engel stressed the criminal justice connection with the current opioid crisis that is claiming lives daily, and drug addiction generally. Stringer asserted, **“We can’t incarcerate our way out of this problem.”** Determining the proper response to criminal behavior spurred by drug addiction will be an issue of urgent concern to the study group.

The group will meet twice monthly and will be open to all House and Senate members. Stakeholders, including law enforcement and county attorneys, public defenders, and organizations with expertise on criminal justice issues will also be invited to participate. Members that have expressed interest in participating are:

Representative David Stringer, Co-Chair
Representative Rusty Bowers (R-25)
Representative T.J. Shope (R-8)
Representative Ben Toma (R-22)

Representative Kirsten Engel, Co-Chair
Representative Reginald Bolding (D-27)
Representative Daniel Hernandez (D-2)
Senator Martin Quezada (D-29)

###

CONTACT:

Matthew Specht
Director of Communications
House Majority Staff
602-926-5518
mspecht@azleg.gov

Robbie Sherwood
Director of Communications
House Democratic Caucus
480-246-7944
rsherwood@azleg.gov